# A CORAL QUEEN

## I

## *THE PURI-PURI MAN*

BY

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## I

### *The Puri-Puri Man*

Through the diamond brilliance of the New Guinea day, Eve Landon rode hard along the road to Sapphire Creek.

She was not going to Sapphire Creek. She was not going anywhere so far as she knew. She was out in the full heat of an equatorial morning, galloping upon a red, shadeless road, because Ronald Kane had told her that he could not afford to marry.

He had made it clear that he wished to marry, and Eve was in no doubt whatever as to his choice were he free. But he was not; that was the trouble. Eve knew his salary. Are not the salaries of the government officers of Papua written down in the annual report, with their ages and their term of service? Kane was, to her knowledge, twenty-nine years old, and had three hundred and twenty-five pounds a year as resident magistrate of Lavi-Lavi. He had a house, he had a garden and fowls, he had free servants. He was not a "good" match, but Eve was in love with him down to the very soles of her arched number three feet, and she had been quite sure that it could be made to "do." She was only waiting for Ronald to speak.

And he did, the day before the steamer came in. He told her about his mother and sisters. It was the simplest and oldest story in the world; the one that has broken more girlish hearts than any other. Ronald Kane, like so many thousands of young unmarried men, free to all appearance, had in reality no right to look at pretty girls as a girl loves that a man should look; no right to go riding with them to the Laloki River; no right at all to sit out on the steps of the Library Institute after a dance and put a willing arm round a willing waist. There was a mother and some sisters; they had hardly any money, they never would have any, and Ronald had to keep them. Out of his poor three hundred and twenty-five pounds a year he had only half for himself. And one of the sisters was an invalid—somehow one always is; you would think she did it to spite pretty girls who want to have a husband and a house and a baby of their own—and the mother was old. And the other sister tried to earn money, but she couldn't; she had never been taught anything useful because there was plenty of money once, and no one ever thought, until dad got typhoid and died——

A story to yawn over for its weary familiarity, if it had not touched one personally. Then every word was written in capitals a mile high; every sentence burned like flame. For it shriveled one's own flower of romance to dead leaves and crackling stems; It told one that one was a miserable girl who was never, never going to marry any one at all, and who would probably die of a broken heart inside a year; it set one calling the boy to catch the horse, and made one swing into the saddle and go rattling and galloping off among the stones of the Sapphire Creek Road as hard as one could go from the coast and the sea and the steamer that was lying in port to carry Ronald away.

What was the use of having one of those nymphlike, twentieth-century figures, lovely and light-footed and long-limbed, that people like the aunts in the morocco photo album never had—what was

the pleasure of knowing that one's small face and neat, round head allowed one to dress one's masses of soft black hair in the latest and most trying fashion, with triumphant result—how could one really enjoy having the handsomest eyes of any white woman in New Guinea—"Eyen grey as glasse"—when Ronald Kane possessed two sisters and a mother who prevented him from marrying?

One might as well be squat and fat, with spectacles!

Eve was an Australian girl, and understood horses, but she was very merciless to the poor "aged" chestnut underneath her that afternoon. And when they had topped the Three Mile Hill, and a long, faint steamer call drove after them up from the sea, she turned the horse's head inland, with something on her lips that wanted very little of being a plain, masculine oath, and tore along the easy levels to the Six Mile Peg, as if all the cannibals from the main range had been in chase.

She was certainly taking it hard. But Eve Landon did not take things easily at any time. Neither did she curtsy to circumstances, nor stand politely out of the way to let Madam Fate walk past. Eve was a fighter. But what was there here to fight!

The chestnut, who had more than enough, dropped, panting, into a walk at the Seven Mile. Eve slapped his shoulder hard with her small, gloved hand; she had no whip, and had used her spurs as much as her conscience would let her. Motu simply shook his head, and plodded along at a determined walk.

Eve let him. Something of the fire that was consuming her seemed to have died down. She no longer desired to massacre the female Kanes. She did not want to slap her own face because she had let Ronald kiss her—after his disgraceful conduct; before his disgraceful conduct, or before she had known of it, kisses had not mattered—she only felt, suddenly and intensely, the melancholy of the golden afternoon, in this country where the days were always full summer, always gold; she saw the regretful look of the haze that dustily veiled the level, lonely distances——

Why lonely? Why regretful? Eve was too young to answer. Till now, any landscape in Papua, where she had spent half a year, or in Australia, where she had spent twenty-three years and a half, had sung to her when she looked at it. Were all landscapes, all the beauties of a beautiful world which she meant to know some day—she had forgotten that she intended to die within the year—going to speak to her in melancholy music forever?

"Oh, money, money, money!" cried Eve, dropping her reins, and beating with her hands on the saddle flaps. Motu was well pleased, and came to a dead stop in a patch of fruiting paw-paw. "How dare it prevent us from being happy? Why can't I get some? If I had any, I could give it to those Kanes, and Ronald could have his poor little pay free to marry on. Oh, I'd sell my soul for money! I know why people kill people for it. I wish there was a devil who'd buy my soul from me. I'm not sure that I've got one, but what there is he'd be welcome to."

She stopped; the restless hands fell quiet. For a moment or two she sat like an equestrian statue, stark and moveless against the dusty turquoise. Then she gathered up her reins, touched Motu with her heel, and moved on.

"Baiva!" she said. The horse cantered on the edge of the road; Eve's divided skirt flapped rhythmically upon the saddle. In the whole wide, rolling plain land of grass and eucalyptus there was not another living creature in sight. The heat, upon that unprotected track, was fearful; far off the pale-blue hump of Hombron Bluff, dim with hanging forests, promised coolness and shade, but the girl was not bound thither. She had a nearer destination.

A mile or two on she wheeled Motu down a side track, and walked him as smartly as she could make him move—it was too rough and overgrown for cantering—over quite a long stretch of windy, burned, God-forsaken-looking country, where it seemed that

nobody ever came or could come but leather-necks and crows. Sailing down the strong trade wind, the crows passed over her head and mocked her with the peculiar, demoniac laugh of the New Guinea crow—a Mephistophelean "Ha-ha!" that would make the fortune of any human actor. And in the blinding sun that drove almost every other bird to silence and shelter, the leather-necks swung among the shadeless heads of coco palms and clattered inanities. "Rock cod!" they cried. "A doctor, a doctor, a doc!" "O-do-get-up-now! O do!"

Eve rode on. "I am a fool," she said to herself, as the miles went by. "A superstitious fool. Well, I will be a superstitious fool, if there's half a quarter of a chance of learning anything by it."

It was a very small brown house—a hut, rather—standing in ever such a small, poor, wind-battered clump of palms, and surrounded by mile on mile of burned, tiger-colored grass. There seemed to be nobody at home, but as Eve checked her horse she heard a dull, whining, droning noise, and recognized it for the sound of native singing. Some one was singing inside the hut, singing to himself alone, as New Guinea natives do sing. It was not quite the usual style of chanting; more than usual, it resembled the cry of the wind hunting along the plains and the moan of waves on the shore. Whoever the singer was, he was a trifle nearer to nature than most of the brown-skinned, cotton-clad Papuans of the Central Division.

Eve Landon slipped from its holster the revolver that she commonly carried on lonely rides, and put it in the pocket of her coat. The character of the New Guinea savage is not of the sort that benefits by any return to nature.

"I am probably a fool," thought the girl to herself as she slipped to the ground and tied her horse to a tree, "but there's no reason for making one's folly any more unsafe than I need be."

She had not forgotten—nor had other people—how the trader Weaver had been cunningly killed, ten miles away, some few years past, because some one wanted the right to paint his house posts red; a right only possessed by successful murderers. It is needless to say that the government of Papua does not countenance this particular form of house decoration.

Eve, walking up to the tumble-down grass hut, not without some ordinary girlish tremors, stopped, and almost turned back when she saw that the doorposts were painted red—inside. Then she flung back her head, and went on.

"All the more reason why I needn't be afraid," she said. "What's done is done with."

The hut stood on piles some six feet high; it had no windows, but a small door opened at each end. Eve climbed up the bamboo ladder to the nearest door and looked in, her heart, in spite of her bravery, thumping hard.

"You are absurd," she thought. "All this part of the Central Division is as safe as Bond Street. And even if it wasn't, you know you'd do it all the same."

Baiva, the sorcerer, was at home. He was sitting cross-legged on a mat at the end of the house, droning his windlike song while he plaited something together. It looked like locks of hair. He was not a very old man—sorcerers seldom are in New Guinea—but the stray wrinkles on his body and the thinning of the immense Motuan bush of hair showed him to be middle-aged. Clothes he had none, save a piece of pandanus leaf about his middle. A chain of human teeth, strung like beads, encircled his neck; a thigh bone, carved into a dagger, hung from his waist by a cord of hair. Eve, in a quick glance included the whole interior of the hut, saw that the thing he was plaiting was a similar cord

Baiva, the sorcerer, plaiting his cord and droning his windy song, looked up as the white girl climbed the ladder, and met her examining glance with a stare from two brown glass eyes with china whites to them, half buried under projecting monkey brows.

It was not the first time that white people had come to Baiva. Strange whisperings about his powers had been in circulation for some considerable time, to the disgust and indignation of the local magistrate, who swore that he would have the old villain in jail the first time he could manage to work up a complaint against him. But Baiva was too cunning to provide the usual material for complaints. If any of the natives died as a result of his spells—or poisons—the thing was too cleverly managed to leave traces. If pigs, or wives—equally valuable to Pauan ideas—were carried off to the lonely hut in the eucalyptus lands and returned no more, the owners were silent, lest a worse thing befall them. But there had not been a sorcerer of Baiva's powers among the Motu tribes within the memory of man.

Eve, her heart beating harder and harder, bent down and entered the hut. It was cool after the burning heat outside; it was pleasantly dusk, and smelled not disagreeably of wood smoke and coconuts. Baiva stopped plaiting, ceased his droning song, and sat still as a burned brown log of the forests.

"He's only a nigger, after all," said Eve to herself. "And I dare say the stuff they told me about his finding things out and answering questions was—just stuff. I've only come for fun."

So she assured herself, because the immobile brown figure on the mats, with its crannied, burning little eyes, began to get on her nerves.

"How on earth am I to talk to him?" she said out loud. "I never thought of that."

She almost jumped when Baiva answered the question:

"Me savvy Englis'. Me talk along Sinuabada—lady. Bee-fore, me diver along Thursday Islan'. Bee-hind, me missi'n teacher. Me savvy altogether everything."

"Oh, you do, do you?" said Eve, finding a clean place on the floor and sitting down. "You seem to be like the man whose one foible was omniscience."

Baiva, brushing the form of the incomprehensible remark aside, answered its spirit with calm certainty:

"This-fellow Sinuabada he too much wild along some one. He like-a talk along me, but he think me no savvy altogether something. That's way he fright along askie me. No good he fright. I tell, Baiva savvy!"

The sorcerer had risen to his feet, and stood before her, fierce, supple, full of a strange power to which she could give no name. Eve rose also. She believed him.

"Tell me," she said, pulling off her only gold bangle and holding it out. "Tell me—I want money. What way I get him?"

Baiva's brown, white-taloned claw shut over the bracelet, but he did not look at it. Suddenly his eyes filmed over. He did not seem to see. He held up one hand for silence.

For something like ten minutes Eve waited, not daring to move. The trade wind went hunting and yelling through the giant spear grass outside; Motu, tied to a tree, stamped now and then, and jinglingly shook his head. A pig wandered under the house, looked up through the slats of the open floor, and grunted.

Then a small, thin voice—not Baiva's—came from far away. Eve knew the man must be ventriloquizing, but she could not see the slightest movement of his lips or throat, and his eyes still wore that strange film.

"You will be rich," said the voice and Eve, in her state of tense excitement, did not notice that it spoke no pidgin English, but good sentences like her own.

"You will be rich soon," went on the voice. Then another silence. Motu stamped furiously; the mosquitoes were beginning to trouble him. A ray of late sun shot through the door; six o'clock, and its sudden dark, could not be far away.

A third time the voice spoke.

"You will be sorry," it said.

Eve, almost holding her breath, listened for more. The silence dropped again, and this time it lasted. She waited. The late ray of sun crept down—crept down——

"Is that all?" she asked in a shaky little voice. There was no answer.

"Is there anything more?"

Baiva stood like a brown tree. His eyes were rolled back so far that scarce anything showed but the whites; he was as still as if he had been petrified.

Eve backed to the ladder, and went down it, watching him. He never moved.

She loosed Motu, and swung her leg over the saddle. The horse was rested and anxious to get home. They went down the track at a hard gallop.

"He wasn't too far in his trance, or whatever it was, to remember to keep hold of the bracelet," she thought, as the wind screamed in her face and tore at her hair.

"So I shall be sorry!" was the next thought. "Well, a good thing to be sorry for, and worth it, but of course it's all nonsense."

It was not till they were in the main road for Port Moresby, cantering steadily up to the Three Mile Hill, that Eve remembered the message had been couched in ordinary English.

"Heavens, or should I say 'Hell!'" she said. "There certainly is something very—very—— It's one of two things; either I was hypnotized into thinking something spoke, or——"

The horse checked into a walk. They went slowly, the young moon climbing beside them.

"Or," said Eve, with something like a shiver—she had been overheated, and the evening wind was chill—"or, through Baiva, something did speak."

* * * * * *

The year was four months older. The southeast had deserted Port Moresby, and where there had been literally a howling wilderness, brown and biscuit-colored, and swept by never-resting winds, there stood green velvet hills, with plains of grass below, and a calm, cloudy sky above, whence almost daily there fell warm torrents of rain. It was a sickly time of year; dysentery was giving trouble, and one or two cases of black-water fever had been brought in to the hospital from the rivers of the north. The little hospital on the top of the hill had the inevitable case or two of delirium tremens to cope with as well, and there was only one nurse.

They inquired for temporary help, and Eve Landon, who had been due to go home next boat, jumped at the chance of staying on. Her visit to the cousins in Papua was more than over, and the Queensland aunt and uncle with whom she lived were clamoring for her to come back and teach the children. Here was a chance to act independently. She had had scarce a line from Ronald since they parted, and her only chance of seeing him again lay in sticking to the country whither he was bound to return in a few weeks. His leave was being taken in South Australia, and there was not the ghost of a chance of meeting him if she went home to Queensland.

So she put on the cap and apron, qualified thereto by a previous year spent in a Brisbane hospital, and became a very capable assistant at the government hospital. If she was somewhat more than an assistant before she had been there a week, and was, indeed, almost holding the reins of the establishment, it was no more than any one would have expected of Eve Landon anywhere. The matron was a gentle little soul, and did not quarrel with her.

Steamer day came—the great day of the three weeks—and all the world in Port Moresby was anxious for its letters. The good-natured little matron let her assistant off to go and get the letters for the hospital.

Eve was panting to secure her mail; she had only heard once from Ronald—a short, unsatisfactory letter—since he went away;

but she was certain, somehow or other, that there would be another letter with this boat.

There was.

She took it with outward calm, sent off the hospital letters by a boy, and looked about her for a refuge to read her own. The town was all alive with steamer folk and steamer business; there was nothing for it but to make for the little red path leading away round Paga Hill, and take refuge in the unused government store at the back. She must, she must, read that letter in quiet.

* * * * * *

Later in the morning a heavy rain-storm came on. Eve Landon returned to the hospital in the middle of it, and walked up the steps dripping at every thread.

"Oh, gracious, nurse, are you mad!" cried the matron. "We'll have you down with fever next, and we can't afford that. Here's another case come in—old Sharky Hal, very bad with a dynamite hand. Why didn't you take your umbrella with you?"

"I did," said Eve, staring at her with gray, glassy eyes that did not seem to see.

"But you never put it up! I declare, if it was any one but you, nurse, I'd say you had been drinking."

"I wish I had," said Eve, walking in without another word.

A few minutes later, in a clean and dry white dress, she was helping the matron to get the theater ready. Sharky Hal had broken the law against dynamite fishing once too often. His shattered hand and arm were to come off.

* * * * * *

With the going down of the sun the wind had ceased. In the black waters of the harbor, New Guinea's great gold stars wove trembling threads like the light of tiny moons.

On Goldie Law, the eucalyptus trees, shaken and torn all afternoon by a rainy northwest gale, were storm-released and still. And in the little hospital on the hill, among the trees, one other tortured thing was verging fast toward stillness and peace. The pearl diver Hal was dying.

They had done all they could for him, but the loss of blood before he reached the hospital had been great, and blood poisoning, too, had had time to begin. The arm had been removed, but collapse was setting in, and no one now could do anything for Sharky Hal.

Nurse Landon was watching beside him. She had done her duty all through that hard day, with black shadows under her eyes and a mouth that was one hard line. She had driven the native orderlies to work, seen to the meals, set and cleared the theater, attended to such of the patients as were under her charge, followed and helped he doctor—all without a word. Since she had been down to fetch the letters in the morning, and had returned from the house on Paga Hill, she had never opened her lips.

They had asked her to take special charge of the dying old pearl diver, and she had fetched her chair and her knitting, and kept silent watch by his side. Sharky Hal's bed had been placed in a small private room overlooking the hill slope and the sea; the unwonted blaze of the steamer lights, and the cheerful rattle of the cargo winches were to be seen and heard through the widely opened window. Port Moresby was busy with its goods and its passengers and its news from the cities south; people were drinking and treating in the bars; from the road at the base of the hospital hill there came up, through the still night, the laughing and talking of men from the ship, walking with friends or sweethearts in the pleasant dark. Above, old Sharky Hal, who had done with it all, was dying.

He did not know it. He asked for his canvas sack of clothes and papers, wanted to turn out the contents, was surprised and annoyed because he could not. In the morning, he said, he would be better. He repeated the statement, as dying people do repeat

things that are unconsciously symbolic. He went on to say that the night had come quicker than he thought it would, but that it would be morning soon.

"Very soon," said Sharky Hal, his grizzly head sinking lower down on the pillows, his milky-blue eyes, that had seen many strange things, and were to see no more, beginning to fix themselves in the dying stare.

And Eve Landon, the hard, the efficient nurse, whose heart was on this night tender from the pain of an unhealed wound, suddenly buried her face in the quilt and burst into tears. She cared only a little about the dying old creature before her, pathetic though he was. She was weeping, though she scarcely knew it, over the man for whom she had sworn she would not weep—Ronald Kane, married three weeks ago to a girl who had money.

Sharky Hal woke up. The death stare left his eyes; his head moved on the pillow.

"Gimme a whisky!" he said faintly, but decidedly.

Eve Landon got it, without reference to the matron, and poured it down Hal's withered throat. He waited, saving his strength, till the moment when the spirit should have done its work, and then said:

"So I'm goin' to wink out?"

"Yes," answered Eve, and almost broke down again.

"You hysterical fool!" she scourged herself. "You know you don't care a pin." She did not. But she had not eaten all day, and she was sick with misery, and in her ears had rung, ever since the hour alone in the little cottage:

"O, my heart's sentence, sounding still!
O, my whole life that ends to-day!"

There was a river of tears running somewhere very near her, and the slightest touch seemed like to cast her into it.

The eyes of Sharky Hal lay on her wonderingly.

"A real lady," he said faintly. "A slap-up young Jane like you doin' the water works over this old battler—Blimy!"

There was silence in the small, dimly lit ward, with its white linen and clean, sharp smell of antiseptics. Something in Sharky Hal's old throat clicked like the works of a clock running down. Then he spoke again:

"Gimme another whisky, and send for Melton."

"Melton! Do you mean the clergyman?" asked Eve, puzzled.

"Parson's name ain't Melton. Lawyer. Lives down the road. Get him for me, quick and lively; I ain't goin' to last much longer."

Another woman would have argued and questioned, gone looking for messengers, asked permission to do this or that. Eve was Eve. She saw at half a glance that something out of the ordinary was afoot, and, braced as always by an emergency, slipped unnoticed out of the hospital in her noiseless night shoes, ran down the road as only Eve Landon could have run, and had Melton, the lawyer, back inside of four minutes.

Melton, a smallish, clean-shaven man, sharp as a prize fox terrier, had an idea of the state of affairs before a word was spoken.

"You want to make your will," he propounded, breathing a bit hard, for Eve had made him travel.

Sharky Hal, racing hard with death, answered succinctly:

"Another whisky, pen and ink and paper—two white witnesses."

The eyes of shrewd Melton snapped. He saw something that Eve did not.

"Get the matron and the wardman, and tell them not to stop to dress," he ordered, taking the doctor's prescription pad, ink, and pen off the table. "Where's the whisky? Right! I'l get it."

Sharky Hal, in a voice that grew too swiftly lower, was dictating before Eve was fairly out of the ward.

The matron, perturbed by the knowedge that her best wrapper

was in the wash, and ony the old blue available; the wardman, blinking, in pajamas, came after a very few minutes.

They were almost too late. Sharky Hal was holding the pen ready to sign, but he had slipped too low to use it. Melton raised him up, and gave him more whisky.

"Sign here," he said, and the old pearl diver signed in a drooping scrawl at the foot of a folded paper.

"Matron, here, please," directed Melton. "Mr. Grey, sign here."

"Where do I sign?" asked Eve.

"You don't sign at all," said Melton. "Look after your patient; he's going."

But Sharky Hal was not going; he had gone.

There is very little for a smart young lawyer to do in Port Moresby, and that little is in the last degree uninteresting save on those comparatively rare occasions when one intoxicated gentleman shoots another gentleman, less or more sober, over the bar of a hotel. A murder trial, especially when you know that nobody is going to be hanged, cheers things up all round and gives the town an appetite for its lunch. But debts and summonses and the run of died-intestate business interest nobody very much, and make no lawyers rich.

Melton had, therefore, every right to look cheerful—discreetly cheerful, as became a man who had lost a not-too-near relation and benefited by it—*on the day of Sharky Hal's funeral*, which was, of course, the day after his death. Melton was reciting the terms of that hurried will over to himself all the way in the boat with the coffin—they bury by whaleboat in Port Moresby, since the town owns no hearses, and the graveyard is far out along the coast. For a hurried deathbed job, from which the luscious roundabout phrases, the relishing "all-that-messuage-and-tenement" flavor were perforce emitted, it was as good a piece of work as you could wish to see. And it promised pickings that Port Moresby did not often provide in the way of "conveyance" and suchlike plums of the solicitorial profession.

After the funeral, Melton, in his smartest Sydney-made white suit, walked up the hospital hill. He held a new, much-cherished Indian pith helmet tightly on his head as he climbed to the small, level plot where the frangipannis and pink oleanders grew. Some instinct, not put into open words, led him to wear and look his best, as far as that might be. He held himself erect, waiting on the veranda for Nurse Landon to be summoned.

Eve Landon, light-limbed, graceful, seeming to sway from her ankles as a flower sways from its root, came out on the veranda. Melton noted that her face was tired, and that she looked through him almost without seeing him; her thoughts seemed far away.

"I wonder who the beggar was," thought the shrewd little man of law. "I wonder what he'll do when he knows—— Miss Landon, may I have a word or two with you?"

"Certainly," was the uninterested reply. "Come into the small ward; there's no one there."

In the room where Sharky Hal, pearl diver, pearl pirate, villain, and kindly soul, had died the day before, Eve and the solicitor sat down upon two unreposeful Austrian chairs. The starched white window curtains flapped like masthead flags against the white-painted wall. A white iron table stood by the white bed. The floor was scrubbed gray white. Colorless, aseptic, stark, the room spoke of death and the things of death.

The solicitor almost trembled as he drew a paper from his pocket. Here, in this place that was the negation of all life, he was to place the very key of life in some one's hands.

"They might make a play about it," he thought.

"Miss Landon," he said, clearing his throat, "did you ever wish for money?"

He was astonished at the effect of his words. A sudden, dark flush welled up over the girl's face; her eyes became instantly wider.

"Wish for it?" was all she said, but there was a reined intensity in her tone that spoke much.

"You would like to have money?"

Now the girl knew. The outrush of joy that he had expected did not come. She only turned very white, and sat waiting for his next words.

"I'm glad to be able to tell you that you have it. The late Mr. Henry Waters, commonly called Sharky Hal, has left you his heiress. If what he says is correct—I think it is, from private information—Mr. Waters owned the only beds of pink precious coral in the Pacific. They're situated a good way north of this, toward Japan, and I understand they're extremely valuable. Pink precious coral, as, of course, you know"—he had read it up himself only the night before—"sells at prices that reach as much as eighty to a hundred and twenty pounds sterling an ounce. You should be an extremely wealthy young lady. Of course"—he was enjoying himself now; it was quite the occasion for a little eloquence—"you will want to know why my late client didn't work the beds and make a rich man of himself. It's a very interesting story, but I'll not trouble you with more than a mere synopsis of the facts. It appears that Mr. Waters acquired the beds by means that made it dangerous for him to visit that part of the world again; he seems to have got them from the Australian sailor, now deceased, who discovered them, by something that seems very like sharp practice—legal, perfectly legal, Miss Landon; I ascertained that; but—ah—somewhat too clever—— People have prejudices against—— At any rate, Mr. Waters, though always intending to return, found himself obliged to lease the beds to an enterprising Japanese half-caste, who seems to have been so lax in the matter of payment that Mr. Sharky Hal seems to have got almost nothing out of it. Our late friend was emphatically not a man of business, and, by the way, can you give me any reason for his—undoubtedly very wise—selection of you as his heiress? Any sort of relationship or——"

"Nothing," replied Eve calmly. She was not going to tell this sharp, small man of law about that misunderstood fit of crying and what it had brought her.

"Ah, gratitude for your care—very proper and not an uncommon case. Well, Miss Landon, I can assure you, from what my client said, that you personally will run no risk from the natives should you care to visit the property, and that, under the care of a competent agent, it can be made exceedingly profitable. The income that should result should certainly be large—many thousands—— I have to congratulate you very heartily, Miss Landon, and to wish you good morning. My time is yours when you wish to send for me."

Melton bowed himself out. Something told him that Eve Landon would be best left alone, and speedily. As he went down again through the rainy-season smell of damp earth and battered flowers, he twirled his watch chain and hummed a tune. He foresaw good days to come. You may know that they came for him, and that is all of Melton.

Eve, alone in the death-white little ward, with the door shut, fell on her knees and buried her head in the bed.

What had she done? What devil had she raised, with the help of Baiva, the sorcerer? It was nonsense and superstition, of course, and yet——

"You will be rich,
You will be rich soon,
You will be sorry. . . ."

It had all come true; it was a gift with a scorpion sting in the tail. If she had not shed those tears, the money would not have

come, and if she had not met with sorrow, the tears would never have been shed. The sorrow had brought the gold.

Eve rose from her knees, and sat down on one of the arid Austrian chairs. They would be calling for her in a minute—it was nearly time to take round the eleven-o'clock tea—but she had still a little space in which to collect herself.

How many years had passed since yesterday morning! She could not have believed it was indeed yesterday that had seen her walking, careless and happy and poor, down to the post office for her letters, and yet there was the steamer that had brought it not yet away from the wharf. She could hear the sound of the cargo winches, rattling as they had rattled all through the night when Sharky Hal, who lay in the graveyard to-day, had lain on his hospital bed, willing away to her the money that was no use——

"Nurse Landon! Nurse Landon! Has any one seen Nurse Landon?" came the voice of the matron. Tea-cups rattled as the native boys carried in the trays.

"Nurse Landon, where are you? Tea!"

Eve sprang to her feet and began pulling off her cap and apron and twisting her mass of black hair tightly round her head.

"Tea be hanged!" she said to herself, and slipped, with snake-like quietness, back to her own room. She had shed her nurse's dress, and was into her divided riding skirt in a couple of minutes; thirty seconds more saw her out of the window, running swiftly down the hill toward the cottage where her saddle was kept. Motu was grazing along the beach; she could catch him without trouble.

Before the justly indignant matron had hunted the hospital all over, and found the probationer nurse to be missing, Eve had caught and saddled her horse, and was riding hard along the muddy-red Sapphire Creek Road, making for the wilderness and Baiva. She could hardly have told what it was that was driving her out—she wanted to know——

The miles, as they ran under Motu's girth, seemed, like a flowing river, to carry away dead things and débris with them. Eve felt her mind clearing. By the time the road leading to the tiger-colored plain was sighted, she was quite sure what it was she wanted to know.

She meant to ask Baiva—if pidgin English could express the question—whether this fortune of hers had in truth come through her misfortune; whether the great ill luck had been brought about to bring the mocking, useless good. Oh, could he only assure her that the one had not actually bought the other! At best, the money came to her stained with fraud and crime; if it had this additional load to carry, she scarcely knew how she could accept it. Perhaps, if she refused it—— But then, he was married! Married!

Baiva's house! Alone on the solitary plain, its grass roof burned white by the sun, its eaves overhanging darkly the brown peeled-sapling walls. The door was shut, and fastened, native fashion, with branches wedged across. There was no smoke arising from the little cook shed; no dogs or pigs were wandering about. Had Baiva gone away? Eve sat in her saddle, staring.

"Mero!" (boy) she called to a young native padding along in the grass, wallaby spear in hand. "Where Baiva?"

"He go," flung the youth over one shoulder.

"Where he go? By and by he coming back?"

"Lasi," said the youth, shaking his woolly head.

"No come? He go long way"

"Eo!" (yes). "Baiva he go finish."

Dead!

The young native, padding rapidly, disappeared in the high grass. Eve sat in her saddle, and spoke no word.

Over the uncharted seas and the unknown ranges the north-west wind blew strongly, laden with nameless scents that stirred the very roots of life. And as it blew it sang—the song of road

and sea that is sung by every wind the wide world over. And the gates of the road and the sea, close shut till now, were slowly swinging on their hinges.

Eve, sitting in her saddle, seemed to listen.

* * * * * *

Far off in Port Moresby, on the Hospital Hill, a small, white-capped, active matron flew from kitchen to ward, from ward to theater, doing two nurses' work, and wondering if Nurse Landon had gone mad.

"If she wants to stay on here, she will have to mend her manners, I can tell her," said the small woman. "That little widow in Konedobu would be only too glad of the job; she's been asking for it constantly."

Eve Landon, riding fast along the highway to the town, had already turned her horse's head by the Konedobu way. She called to the widow as she passed that they were wanting her at the hospital. Then she set Motu to a canter; she was in a hurry to get back and pack her things.

"I'll never know now," she told herself, as the horse's hoofs sounded quick and hollow in the dip by Goldie Law, "whether that money has a double load of ill luck to carry or only a single one. But, single or double, give me the world to travel through, and I'll lift it all."

THE END